

V Corps Military Police Help Restore Law and Order

By Specialist Kristopher Joseph

The first efforts to restore law and order in post-Saddam regime Iraq began 9 May 2003 when the Iraqi police and the U.S. MP soldiers under the command of V Corps's 18th Military Police Brigade conducted joint patrols in the war-torn streets of Baghdad.

The 549th Military Police Company is part of the 3d Military Police Battalion, 3d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia, and is currently attached to the 18th for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Fresh from a deployment rotation in Bosnia, the 549th came to Southwest Asia as the J.P. Holland winner for best MP company in the Army and was given the honor of being the first U.S. MP unit to be on the road with Iraqi police.

The joint patrols are putting the Iraqi police in charge. The military police are to offer training advice and give assistance if the Iraqi officers need extra help. "We are here to lend credibility to their police force," one soldier said. "It's their laws and their country. We are going to back them up." A patrol then began. After circling their patrol sector, the Iraqis stopped at one of their abandoned police stations. Inside, the officers familiarized the U.S. military police with their operations. In the course of the briefing, the Iraqi police took the Americans on a room-by-room tour of the station, noting that some rooms were used by Saddam Hussein's much-feared secret police. The Iraqi officers even turned over documents that revealed information that the secret police had used to root out and quell those who opposed Saddam's rule.

As the group prepared to leave the station, the 549th received a radio message reporting that a witness claimed to have seen a man attempting to rape a young girl. The joint police team returned to the Joint Operation Center to get the full picture. When they arrived, the witness told them that the man in question was armed but wounded in the leg, and the girl was safely in the custody of the witness. After some coordination, the U.S. military police and the Iraqi police went to the home of the accused man. Stopping a block from the man's house, the joint team huddled to work out their arrest procedures. The Iraqi police took the lead and entered the home, while the U.S. military police secured the area's perimeter. Moments later, the Iraqis emerged from the home with the accused man and his accomplices in custody. The police found an AK-47 assault rifle and a cache



Photo by SPC Kristopher Joseph

SPC Michael Williams, first platoon, 549th Military Police Company, exchanges pleasantries with an Iraqi policeman as U.S. military police and Iraqi police prepare for the first joint patrol in Baghdad, May 9.

of ammunition in the house. Across the street, a crate of grenades was also uncovered.

The collapse of the regime weakened Iraq's infrastructure, leaving it vulnerable to organized crime. With little money and scarce food and resources, the Iraqi police will have their hands full with citizens trying to take advantage of the current economic conditions. Getting the Iraqi police remobilized is a big first step in handing the society back to the people. There are still many issues to iron out. Former V Corps commander, Lieutenant General William S. Wallace, said that thousands of Iraqi police—more than half of the entire force—have responded to the call to return to duty. But there are big challenges ahead, the general added: a lack of mobility, a shortage of equipment, the challenges of ensuring that the Iraqi police are paid a reasonable wage, and reestablishing Iraqi officers' authority. Until these issues and more are settled and the U.S. military feels that the Iraqi police are fully capable to operate on their own, the joint patrols are scheduled to continue.